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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MAY 24 GULF SECURITY DIALOGUE IN
QATAR

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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Embassy Doha is pleased to welcome the Gulf Security Dialogue delegation to Qatar. This second GSD meeting and the first in Doha will mean a lot to the Qatari leadership. It will strengthen our mil-to-mil relationship and help in our efforts to moderate the Qataris' more objectionable foreign policy efforts. (An agenda with U.S. objectives follows in paragraph 18.) The Government of Qatar remains a key ally of the U.S. in the war on terror and has supported a significant U.S. military presence in the country since the beginning of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. With Qatar's economy growing at a record pace thanks to both oil and gas production, the Amir is spearheading a program of political reform and economic development. Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, his consort, is making equally important strides in leading social change. Qatar's relations with Iran are outwardly cordial but like other Arab Gulf states, Qatar is seriously concerned about the activities and intentions of its large neighbor across the waters. End Summary.

U.S.- QATARI MILITARY RELATIONS

¶2. (C) At the strategic level, bilateral military relations between the U.S. and Qatar are excellent and the GOQ continues to demonstrate strong support for U.S. military operations. However, our mil-mil relationship has been plagued in recent months by problems on customs and immigration issues. The GOQ has imposed customs procedures not used in the past that have caused severe degradation in CENTCOM's operational readiness. There is a new requirement, for example, for written approval from GHQ Logistics for each of our cargo pallets before customs officials will process the cargo for clearance. For the past months, we have been working to ensure the new procedures are followed while limiting the negative effects to our operations. Unfortunately, we will be unable to sustain the negative effects for a long period of time. We have proposed to have a legal team from CENTCOM meet with Qatari counterparts to hammer out written customs procedures. The GOQ has agreed in principle but has thus far been unable to agree to a specific date.

¶3. (S) Currently Qatar hosts approximately 9,000 U.S. forces based at Camp As-Sayliyah and Al-Udeid Air Base. Some 100 U.S. and Coalition fighter and support aircraft operate from Al Udeid Air Base, making the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing the largest in the USCENTCOM AOR. In addition to the USCENTCOM Forward Headquarters at Camp As-Sayliyah, Qatar

also hosts the Combined Air Operations Center at Al Udeid Air Base for theater-wide command and control. Al Udeid Air Base itself continues to undergo a surge of both GOQ and U.S. funded construction to support U.S. operational and logistical requirements.

REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICY

¶4. (C) Qatar has adopted an increasingly assertive foreign policy not always in line with our own regional efforts and those of our other allies. Qatar's mediation between Fatah and Hamas on a Palestinian unity government, its continued relationship with Syrian president Bashar al-Asad, Hamas leader (and PA Prime Minister) Ismail Haniyah, and others, as well as Qatar's efforts to involve itself in the August 2006 cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon, has annoyed many regional governments -- and often the U.S. Its relationship with Saudi Arabia is strained by anti-Saudi programming on Al Jazeera, a history of border issues, and Qatar's desire to emerge from the Kingdom's sphere of influence in the Gulf and be viewed as a progressive, outward-looking alternative to what they regard as Saudi Arabia's backwardness and provincialism. The result is a set of policies that antagonize Riyadh.

IRAN

¶5. (C) In private, Qatari officials express concern about the role of Iran in the region and its pursuit of nuclear weapons (which they believe is unstoppable). They agree with our

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analysis of Iran's revolutionary motivations and goals and note Iran's active support for subversive elements in Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, eastern Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Qatar had no objection to the stationing here of B1 bombers and Patriot missile batteries and they signed onto the Proliferation Security Initiative principles.

¶6. (C) Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) has stated that Qatar will not participate in any attack on Iran -- a formulation that appears to be purposely ambiguous. At no time, however, have the Amir or Sheikh Tamim explicitly warned the U.S. against using Al Udeid in any direct conflict with Iran. But Qatar is likely to continue trying to balance its U.S. military cooperation -- its ultimate strategic defense -- with diplomatic efforts that seek to avoid antagonizing Iran. Thus, despite its wariness of Iran, Qatar has sought to keep lines of communication open. Qatar is uncomfortable with having to say or do anything publicly that might be seen as antagonizing Iran. The two countries share the largest non-associated gas field in the world and the source of much of Qatar's future prosperity.

IRAQ

¶7. (S) Qatar has been a pillar of support for our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. We continue to fly unimpeded combat missions out of Al Udeid Air Base. The Amir shares our view that restoration of order and a successful democratic transition are of paramount importance not only to Iraq but to the region. However, there is some feeling that Qatar's efforts over the past three years are not fully appreciated in Washington, and this may drive Qatar's resistance to follow through on some of our priorities for Iraq, including comprehensive debt forgiveness. While HBJ has expressed concerns about civil war in Iraq, he has also stated publicly that the coalition needs to stay in the country to establish wider security. The GOQ also points to the importance of

establishing a power structure in Baghdad that is fully inclusive of the Sunni bloc. The GOQ is not prepared to open an embassy in Baghdad until the security situation improves dramatically.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

¶8. (C) The Qataris have not always behaved responsibly on the UN Security Council. Under HBJ, Qatar has staked out an independent path on Iran and Syria, which has had troublesome consequences on the Council. (They, like the U.S., look forward to the end of their term, December 31 of this year.) Qatar sees itself as holding the Arab "seat," and it sometimes gives interests of this region a priority over global security issues. On Iran's nuclear program, this approach resulted in a 14 to 1 consensus-breaking UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1696 in July. However, since then, Qatar has been part of two unanimous votes, UNSCR 1736 and UNSCR 1747, to impose sanctions on Iran's nuclear program. On several occasions, Qatar has voted against our wishes (and often against the broad international consensus) on issues such as Sudan and Burma.

AL JAZEERA

¶9. (C) Though their coverage of Qatar itself is minimal, Al Jazeera is by far Qatar's - and the region's - most prominent media outlet and the bane of many governments in the region. With an Arabic-speaking audience of around 50 million viewers, Al Jazeera is now ten years old. In November it launched an English-language edition with a potential audience of 70 million and ambitions to compete with the major U.S. and British satellite networks worldwide.

¶10. (U) Since early last year, the USG has seen a bumpy downward trend in inflammatory anti-Western bias and inaccuracy in Al Jazeera's content. Al Jazeera has increased its use of U.S. government sources, limited its use of inflammatory terminology, and devoted more time to stories of interest in the region other than the U.S. role in Iraq. However, Al Jazeera's track record remains far from acceptable. Unprofessional, biased, and inaccurate propaganda continues to appear on its newscasts, talk shows, and website. The USG objected to Al Jazeera's practice of airing terrorist-provided video tapes, though the terrorists

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increasingly prefer to use the internet to release these videos.

¶11. (C) DIA began monitoring the channel's compliance with U.S.-promoted journalistic standards in March 2005. Never higher than 20% (October 2005), these ratings have dropped to the low single-digits during the last quarter, and in DIA's most recent report (January 2007), Al Jazeera's "hostile" coverage was pegged at 1 percent.

POLITICAL REFORM

¶12. (U) Qatar's own program of reform, launched by the Amir after he assumed power in 1995, could take a significant step forward when the government eventually holds first-time elections for its national legislature. Qatar has gone slow, seeking to establish an institution that reflects local social and political norms. The current sticking points are who will be able to vote (likely a fraction of Qatar's 186,000 citizens) and who may stand for office. Qatari women have had the right to vote since the first election took place in the country in 1999, for the Central Municipal Council. Elections for the country's third municipal council

took place April 1, and a woman was elected with the highest number of votes in any district.

ECONOMY

¶13. (U) At USD 61,540, Qatar's per capita income is ranked fifth in the world (and ahead of the U.S.). The country's vast wealth is a result of the successful development of its natural gas resources: Qatar is now the world's largest exporter of LNG. The country has plans for even greater expansion over the next five years, during which time exports will more than double. Qatar Petroleum is maximizing use of Qatar's natural resources to diversify the economy and provide business and employment opportunities to Qataris. Qatar is friendly to U.S. energy companies: Since 1999, there has been USD 60 billion in foreign investment in Qatar's energy sector with the majority -- about USD 40 billion -- coming from the U.S. firms, including Exxon Mobil, Conoco Phillips, Chevron, Anadarko, and Occidental. Qatar plans to invest USD 70 billion in the natural gas sector over the next seven years, with LNG exports to the U.S. beginning in 2009 and amounting to one-third of our LNG needs.

¶14. (U) The GOQ estimates Qatar's oil reserves at 27 billion barrels. Qatar's daily average production is currently estimated to be 806,000 barrels per day; at current production rates, oil reserves are expected to last 20 to 60 years, depending on estimates. Qatar's goal is to increase overall production capacity to over one million bpd by 2006. Occidental and Anadarko are the two U.S. companies operating in this sector.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

¶15. (U) Qatar signed a Trade and Investment Framework agreement with the U.S. in March 2004, but progress toward a Free Trade Agreement has stalled, and the TIFA Council has not met since its inception. Achieving a FTA will require Qatar to remove such obstacles as mandatory majority Qatari ownership of most businesses, the government telecom monopoly, restrictions on foreign investment in the financial services sector, labor issues, and transparency in government procurement.

EDUCATION

¶16. (U) Qatar's commitment to modernize its educational system is exemplified by Education City, a 2500-acre campus on the outskirts of Doha. Managed by Qatar Foundation, the umbrella organization chaired by Sheikha Mozah, Education City is home to five U.S. college branch campuses, with some 800 students currently enrolled. The majority (roughly 60%) are Qatari; others come from around the region and some from further beyond, including Bosnia and the U.S. About two-thirds of the students are women, since the Education City campuses allow them to live at home with their families.

¶17. (U) Five U.S. branch campuses are currently represented

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at Education City: Virginia Commonwealth University (fashion design, interior design, graphic design); Weill Cornell Medical College (medicine); Carnegie-Mellon University (business, computer science); Texas A&M University (engineering); and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism is expected to open in the fall. The National Defense University is considering locating a branch of its Near East-South Asia (NESA) Center in Doha. While far short of Sheikha Mozah's wish for a branch of West Point, "NESA

Forward" would represent a step in the direction she wants Arab militaries to go.

Annotated GSD Agenda

¶18. (C) Our objectives from GSD engagement are indicated in the following annotated agenda:

¶A. Regional Security:

- Iran Intelligence Brief to include environmental impact of accident at Iranian Nuclear Facilities (U.S.)
- Overview of regional threats - Iran-focused (Qatar)
- Regional security overview, including Lebanon, Sudan, and Somalia (U.S.)
- Next steps related to Iran (Qatar and U.S.)

Our objective is to achieve closer positions on the key regional issues, particularly those that come before the UN Security Council. The centerpiece of this topic is Iran, consulting with the Qataris on our policy and preparing the Qataris for next steps at the UNSC. The Qataris will probe for U.S. plans and intentions vis-a-vis Iran. Darfur is another major UNSC issue on which we have differed and need to determine whether these differences can be bridged. Other issues of interest: Qatar's position on Lebanon and the Hariri Tribunal, and Somalia.

¶B. Critical energy infrastructure protection (CEIP)

- Current state of Qatari Infrastructure Security Program (Qatar)
- Proposal for a Joint Working Group and visits by experts (U.S.)

The topic was raised in the Secretary of Energy's meeting with Minister of Energy and Industry Abdullah al-Attiyah at the beginning of May. It is not clear that the minister was prepared to discuss the topic, but we believe the Qataris will be receptive to increased bilateral cooperation on this issue. Embassy recommends using the GSD to propose a Joint Working Group and an early June "get acquainted" visit by U.S. experts.

¶C. Enhanced defensive capabilities and cooperation.

- Overview of Qatari defense needs, including missile defense (Qatar)
- Bilateral Air Defense Initiative and related weapons systems (U.S.)
- Enhanced maritime security (Qatar and U.S.)
- Interoperability (Qatar and U.S.)
- ExecutiveSummary of EAGLE RESOLVE (Qatar)

Discussion would focus on ways to increase inter-operability between U.S. and Qatari defense systems, pave the way for greater intra-Gulf cooperation, and advise on a strategy for establishing greater maritime security. The U.S. delegation could seek an understanding on Qatar's missile defense needs.

¶D. Developing a shared assessment and agenda on Iraq

- Security overview (U.S.)
- Political, Security and Economic Assessment (Qatar)
- New Way Forward Strategy (U.S.)
- Support to Iraq (Madrid pledges, debt relief, International Compact) (Qatar)

HBJ believes Qatar was left out of discussions on the International Compact on Iraq and excluded from the recent Iraq Neighbors meeting, and so has not been a very fruitful interlocutor on Iraqi issues. Qatar's delegation should nevertheless appreciate this consultation with them on our Iraq policy. Qatar should be pressed on efforts to help the Iraqi government achieve stability -- in particular debt relief, disbursement of Madrid pledges, and naming a diplomatic representative.

¶E. Counter-proliferation

- Review of counter-proliferation laws (Qatar)

-- Discussion of interdiction procedures (Qatar)

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-- Participation in future PSI exercises and events (Qatar)
-- Global Initiative (GI) to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and
Chemical (U.S.)
-- Chemical Weapons Convention MOU (U.S.)

Qatar has signed on to the Proliferation Security Initiative and sent observers to sea exercises off Bahrain. However, Qatar's understanding of the PSI principles is weak from a legal perspective, and their willingness to take on a more active role is uncertain. The Qataris have dodged every effort to discuss Chemical Weapons Convention MOU on challenge inspections; the GSD is the only (reasonable) remaining forum to advance the issue. On the Qatari side, the MFA (legal office) and MOD are both players. The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism: The Qataris have not responded to our initial invitation to join; apparently, they require more intensive engagement -- as a valued ally would receive, in their view -- before signing on.

F. Counterterrorism and internal security

-- CT and internal security threat assessment (Qatar)
-- Update on anti-money laundering/terrorist finance efforts (Qatar)
-- Intelligence sharing (U.S. and Qatar)

FBI has provided anti-money laundering/counter-terrorism finance training, but otherwise we have not engaged the Qataris deeply. With a Financial Information Unit and Egmont-Group membership, they are moving in the right direction. But is government oversight keeping up with rapid economic growth, and do they have enough skilled staff? Local banks have strong AML/CTF/Supervision departments. Concrete "areas for improvement" in intelligence-sharing capability and practice should be discussed.

G. Establishing a Follow-Up Mechanism.

As the GSD is our primary policy-level forum with the GOQ, Embassy offers to coordinate follow-up with relevant agencies and report as needed. In order for follow-up to be effective, the GOQ will need to name an official with authority to work inter-agency on agreed policies and measures.

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